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Johns Island

Mr. Abraham Jenkins

GOD AIN'T MAKING NO MORE LAND

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Land on these islands got to be so valuable because of the development projects on Kiawah and Seabrook. At one time you could get an acre of land for less than fifty dollars. Now land costs a lot more. It's almost impossible to buy land now. We got people out here now that come to buy with cash money. This is a way of enticing and influencing people because people have spent all their lives trying to make some money and here this guy walks up to you with rolls of thousand dollar bills circled by hundreds and five hundreds and starts talking. Many of these people just want to take the money and I can understand it. But you have to let them know that God ain't making no more land, and if you got any, you better hold onto it and try to work some other type of arrangement like long-term leasing. Sometimes you can be land-rich, but you can lose it all.

Black land is a threat to further development. It's slowing things down. I'll give you an example of how these developers operate. There is a black family that used to own about seventy-nine acres of land on Johns Island. The land developers were out there like buzzards trying to find an heir to that property that would not have any interest in the property. In this particular case the heir was somebody in New York and the developer said, "I will give

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you X amount of dollars for what you own on Johns Island." He said, "Man, what are you talking about? I have never been to Johns Island." The developer said, "Yes, but you own something down there." The developer looked like Santa Claus to him and he just went on and took the money. 423 425

The developer took the signed agreement into probate court and started suing for partition. They couldn't agree on how to divide the seventy-nine acres. The court said since the relatives could not agree who was going to get the swamp, who was going to get the waterfront, who was going to get whatever, then the whole property should be sold and the money divided.

The developer wanted the whole thing anyway. When he signed the piece of paper for whatever he owned, he became a member of the family. He would not agree to any settlement. When they had the partition sale, he had someone come and outbid the rest of the family.

We're planning quarterly land workshops now so that people can learn more about how to protect their land. 423

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Ms. Elaine Jenkins

WE CAN HAVE SOME SAY AS TO WHAT'S GOING TO BE DEVELOPED

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We've been meeting and talking about heirs' property and how to get it cut up now so that folk don't lose all of it. There are so many people involved, all it takes is for one person to sell out. Once that one sells and some stranger gets in, he can force a partition suit, and they may end up losing a whole tract of land. What we've been trying to do is tell them how to get it partitioned among family members. So if one wants to sell, fine. He will just have that acre or so. But not the whole tract going out from under them.

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I'm talking to them about taxes and the importance of paying those taxes. And we're notifying people when we see their land up for sale for nonpayment of taxes. I'm talking to them about making wills. If you don't make a will that's where all these heirs come in. It's just so much to keep up with.

Being a lawyer is something I always knew I wanted to do, from the time I can remember. And my intentions were always to return to Charleston and Johns Island. This is where I wanted to be. I love this place.

We can have some say as to what's going to be developed—what's going to go up and where it's going to go up. That's still open to us.